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BALANCING OPERATIONAL MANEUVER:  
THE 1950 U.N. OFFENSIVE IN KOREA

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## Abstract of

### "Balancing Operational Maneuver: The 1950 U.N. Offensive in Korea"

This paper is an operational case study of the Korean War that focuses on the United Nations Command (UNC) offensive of 1950. This study examines the requirement to balance operational functions in war by looking at the operational maneuvers of this campaign and contrasting these maneuvers against considerations of other operational functional areas as characterized by the national and theater-strategic situation prevailing at the time. The review of this case will provide fairly simple and sometimes obvious lessons.

This case study will evaluate operational maneuver against the operational functions of fires, protection, logistics, intelligence, and command and control. The analysis will be conducted in the context of the medium of space, time and forces involved. Further, it will consider the interaction between these factors and the levels of war, an especially interesting comparison because of the compression and cross-over effects of tactical and operational events. These lessons will offer valuable teaching points that military professionals can use as they plan and execute future military operations or campaigns.

The proximate cause for the failure of the UNC offensive of 1950 was the imbalance and ineffective linkage between critical operational functions and the maneuver offensive conducted into North Korea in the fall of 1950. The root of this failed linkage is attributable to the inability of General MacArthur to balance national and theater strategic objectives while commanding field forces at the operational level.

The United Nations Command (UNC) offensive in 1950 during the Korean War provides an example of brilliant operational maneuver followed by strategic disaster. A review of this case will yield lessons, perhaps obvious, but still vital and timeless. This study makes these cases: 1) that strategic and operational objectives often do not reinforce one another, 2) spectacular operational maneuver does not ensure strategic success, 3) accomplishing the strategic end state is reliant on proper structure, organization and chain of command, 4) operational intelligence can only be effective if it fuses strategic and tactical intelligence, and, 5) carefully consider the results expected from operational fires and structure them to deliver operational effects.

This case study will evaluate operational maneuver against the operational functions of fires, protection, logistics, intelligence, and command and control. The analysis will be conducted in the context of the medium of space, time and forces involved. Further, it will consider the interaction between these factors and the levels of war, an especially interesting comparison because of the compression and cross-over effects of tactical and operational events. These lessons will offer valuable teaching points that military professionals can use as they plan and execute future military operations or campaigns.

The principle cause for the failure of the UNC offensive of 1950 was the imbalance and ineffective linkage between critical operational functions and the maneuver offensive conducted into North Korea in the fall of 1950. The root of this failed linkage is attributable to the inability of General MacArthur to balance national and theater strategic objectives while commanding field forces at the operational level. As the U. S. Marine Corps history of the war concluded: "It is a lesson of

history that questions of how to use a victory can be as difficult as problems of how to win one."<sup>1</sup> In the case of Korea in September of 1950 this may certainly have been true.

The brilliantly conceived and magnificently executed amphibious assault at Inchon overnight turned the tide of battle in Korea. The UNC, which had been literally on the verge of being forced into the sea from its peninsula toehold at Pusan, found itself in late September threatening to entrap and destroy an overextended and weakened North Korean People's Army (NKPA). Within two weeks of executing the assault at Inchon, elements of X Corps of the UNC had retaken Seoul, moved to interdict supply lines and escape routes of the NKPA forces engaged in South Korea, and linked up with advance elements of the Eighth Army which had slugged its way out of the Pusan Perimeter. The UN, the President of the United States and his advisors, and General MacArthur, the Commander of United Nations Forces, found that UNC forces were on the cusp of a magnificent victory. After careful consideration regarding the operational and strategic objectives of the war, General MacArthur was authorized to cross the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel into North Korea, initially to destroy NKPA forces, but later with an enlarged mandate to ensure the stability of Korea and enforce the reunification of Korea under a democratically elected unified government.<sup>2</sup> In executing this mandate it seems clear that General MacArthur felt that he had three major tasks to achieve: the capture of the North Korean capital of P'yongyang, destruction of the NKPA, and the occupation of North Korea along its northern border to present the People's Republic of China with a fait accompli and so discourage its involvement in the war.<sup>3</sup>

Initial focus of the U.N. Command offensive north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was to be P'yongyang. In the view of General MacArthur and his

Far East Command Joint Strategic Plans and Operations Group a multiple-direction attack was the best means to overcome the North Korean's expected fanatical defense. Accordingly, one of the best alternative routes into the backside of P'yongyang was "the lateral Wonsan-P'yongyang corridor." To secure this corridor General MacArthur decided to go to his trick bag and execute another amphibious operation employing the X Corps, this time against the North Korean east-coast harbor of Wonsan. Advantages of "...basing X Corps at Wonsan also assured Almond an excellent field of operations toward the vital Hamhung-Hungnam industrial complex and other points in northeastern Korea."<sup>4</sup> This facilitated the accomplishment of the other two critical tasks that General MacArthur had to achieve to end the war on favorable terms, the destruction of NKPA forces and the isolation of the North Korean border to deter and prevent Chinese or Soviet intervention.

The implementation of this reorientation of forces caused consternation among the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and within both Eighth Army and X Corps.<sup>5</sup> The withdrawal of the X Corps elements from combat north of Seoul and their retrograde to Inchon in preparation for the Wonsan assault even under the best of circumstances was bound to cause a loss of UNC combat power in the P'yongyang drive. However, the extent of the disruption and its effect on operations in the Eighth Army were beyond those anticipated.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the UNC continued to enjoy tactical success during October. Indeed, by the time X Corps went ashore at Wonsan, both the major tactical events that its assault was intended to support had been accomplished by the pre-existing major force dispositions.<sup>7</sup> In the west the Eighth Army, under General Walton Walker, began its attack on P'yongyang on 9 October. The North Korean capitol fell to UNC forces on 20 October without the benefit of any

support of X Corps, and despite the adverse effects of the X Corps redeployment. In the east, the I ROK Corps preempted the X Corps seizure of the industrially rich Wonsan-Hamhung-Hungnam triangle. It seized Wonsan on 10 October in its aggressive northward advance; Hamhung and Hungnam fell to the ROK forces on 18 October. X Corps was at that time still afloat off the coast, its landing delayed by the mining of Wonsan harbor approaches and at the landing beaches. On 26 October, X Corps finally had significant forces ashore in position for future operations and new orders were issued for a rapid three-pronged advance to the Yalu.<sup>8</sup>

In the west, after capturing P'yongyang, Eighth Army had continued to attack focusing on the containment and destruction of NKPA forces in zone. Eighth Army was arrayed with a two Corps frontage in the attack, the US I Corps in the west and ROK II in the east of the Eighth Army zone. In their drive northward, in a series of tactical actions oriented on enemy forces, the Eighth Army attacked through the Sukch'on-Sunch'on line attempting to cut off the defenders of P'yongyang and destroy enemy forces. The next phase of the Eighth Army advance was on to the Ch'ongch'on River, with elements crossing on 24 October. By late October with a logistically strained force, sustained by very thin lines of communications and supported largely by trucked delivery of supplies, the Eighth Army prepared to continue the attack to the Yalu.<sup>9</sup>

The Ch'ongch'on River marks one of the last significant barriers upon which the NKPA could have based a conventional defense in northeast Korea. Beyond the Ch'ongch'on River and valley, the terrain in North Korea becomes a very rugged, at times a trackless wasteland to the Manchurian boarder approximately 60 to 80 air miles away. Into this rugged area the Eighth Army attacked in late October. This was the



point where the Chinese Communist Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) elected to strike.

Through the month of October, starting as early as 9 October, major regular elements of the PLA had slipped undetected into the rugged mountains of North Korea. The first phase of the PLA counteroffensive struck to bloody the nose of UNC, in the east and west, in both Eighth Army and X Corps sectors. In a series of vicious engagements, the PLA struck hard. "In the air, UN pilots were opposed for the first time by speedy Russian MIG-15 jets which appeared briefly and then flashed away toward Manchurian airfields."<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding significant indicators of the strength of the Chinese intervention at this point, General MacArthur and his Far East Command refused to believe that the Chinese had intervened in force, assuming that the forces arrayed in front of the UNC were simply volunteers who had crossed the border to be integrated into NKPA formations. Tactical commanders on the ground however were not convinced. Generals Walker, Commander of Eighth Army, and O. P. Smith, the Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, along with many senior ROK commanders were confident that they faced a much more significant threat, based on the tactical indicators from the units in combat and the prisoners they captured.

However, "By 10 November the front generally was quiet and for the next two weeks the Eighth Army and X Corps advanced slowly against moderate resistance and rear guard actions."<sup>11</sup> On 24 November General MacArthur announced a major offensive designed to end the war. It was met the following day, 25 November, by a massive communist counteroffensive, which struck first against the ROK II Corps in Eighth Army sector and then two days later principally against the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division of X Corps.

With the entire UN offensive thrown into reverse, forward elements of the X Corps were forced to withdraw nearly sixty miles southward through precipitous mountain trails to the coast through masses of enemy infantry....Because of the massiveness of the Chinese attack, General MacArthur directed the commanders of the X Corps and the UN naval and air forces to co-ordinate in effecting the evacuation of the X Corps... General MacArthur decided to transfer the X Corps to South Korea where its strength could be used to reinforce the Eighth Army in opposing the next Chinese offensive of the winter campaign.<sup>12</sup>

The UNC offensive of 1950 collapsed under the weight of a massive counter offensive led by Communist Chinese forces. However, beyond the obvious factors of superior numbers and surprise there are a number of contributing causes of the failure of this offensive. The larger of these are the ones that will provide the best lessons in understanding the interaction between the operational functions.

**Lesson 1.** Sometimes the objectives sought at one level of war may be inconsistent with the abilities of the commander operating at another level of war to achieve in the manner prescribed.

Even if the correct decisions regarding the critical relationship among space, time, force, and objective are made at the theater strategic level of war, failure can still result from operational level causes. Often strategic considerations and operational considerations run contrary to one another. This will be demonstrated through an examination of General MacArthur's extremely complicated decisions regarding the strategic factors of space, time, forces, and objective.

**Objective.** It is clear that General MacArthur personally and professionally preferred an expansive political objective. The shifting objectives of General MacArthur's mission - there are at least three - were all sanctioned explicitly by both the United States Government and the UN.<sup>13</sup> There are understandable practical, human, political, and

military reasons that support the expansion of the missions assigned to General MacArthur.

The timing of the decisions supporting the expansion of the UNC mission was critical since they preceded slightly, or followed closely in the wake of, the stunning success of the Inchon operation. The feeling of the times was opportunism. Accordingly there was significant military, political, and diplomatic support for General MacArthur's expansive views.<sup>14</sup> Practically too, one must accept that there were punitive emotions afoot. No one wanted to see the DPRK rewarded with sanctuary in the wake of its unprovoked aggression. The proximity of Seoul to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was also a key consideration behind the preference to expand the political objective from restoration of the status quo ante bellum to a reunification of the Korean peninsula under the leadership of the south. A NKPA that remained intact simply posed too great a threat to the ROK capital. As a result, General MacArthur properly determined that he needed to project military power north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to secure the destruction of the NKPA forces and prevent them from being an offensive threat.

Time. General MacArthur appropriately recognized that the success of the Inchon landing had changed the dynamic of time. It is reasonable to argue that time favors the defender in the case where the defender is awaiting reinforcements or intervention of a third party belligerent. The Inchon landing had changed that dynamic from favoring the UNC to favoring the DPRK forces. However, the Inchon landing also yielded the initiative to the UNC in a big way.

To harness the advantage this afforded him, while mitigating the risk of third party intervention, General MacArthur had to move with decisive force in a rapid manner. He sought to destroy the NKPA so as

to establish conditions for the transition to a democratically elected government in a unified state of Korea. The accomplishment of this task in the fastest manner possible would have the added benefit of discouraging intervention by third party belligerents. In the end there was clearly a strategic failure in assessing the risks of third party intervention, but the fact remains that speed of action was required to secure the best military conditions.

Space. To achieve the objectives he had been assigned, General MacArthur was anxious to project military forces throughout North Korea to a depth and breath that would accomplish the disruption of NKPA activities, and secure vital industrial, social, cultural, and political locations. This power projection would have prevented major force concentrations by the defeated NKPA forces while facilitating the transition of civil control to occupation forces. Given the disruption of the NKPA because of the scope of the defeats suffered during Inchon and the subsequent breakout operations, the UNC had the opportunity to consolidate authority over these areas with reasonable risks (for a moment ignoring the intelligence failures regarding the ultimately decisive intervention by PLA forces).

Pursuit and exploitation operations were used to accomplish rapid attacks in depth. General MacArthur is criticized in hindsight because of his decision to divide his forces in the face of the enemy by pulling X Corps from the P'yongyang front and deploying them to the east coast at Wonsan. Certainly there are valid elements in this criticism. However, to be fair, the decision needs to be reviewed in the light of the context of the time and from the perspective of the theater strategic level of war. When General MacArthur pulled X Corps out of the lines to operate against the eastern coastal area, the NKPA was

largely defeated. Indeed the fact that the Eighth Army was able to conduct a successful offensive against the P'yongyang front in the absence of the X Corps suggests that there may have been a force imbalance in the west.<sup>15</sup> Forces moving up the east coast consisted of a two division ROK Corps, operating in an area of significant size. The deployment of other UNC forces in this area was a prudent measure to balance space with forces. Finally, General MacArthur, operating at the strategic level of war, was anxious to have forces arrayed in such a manner as to provide for the occupation of North Korea. With Eighth Army on the western side of the Taebaek Mountains and X Corps on the east, General MacArthur would have positioned his forces to garrison an occupied North Korea and protect the civil population and repatriated NKPA soldiers from the excesses and possible brutal treatment from ROK forces in retribution for actions in the south.

Force. General MacArthur suffered some criticism for the application of his forces during this operation. In addition to criticism associated with untimely movement of X Corps to the east, he is criticized for keeping X Corps in General Headquarters Reserve instead of assigning them to the Eighth Army. While this criticism is valid from the operational perspective, there is a rational defense for this relationship given the terrain separating the two commands, the logistical challenges of supplying the forces over the duration of the operation, and from the perspective of a Commander In Chief (CINC) planning for war termination.

The Taebaek Mountain range had a major impact on the command and control of forces assigned on the far side of the range. Control of forces over such an obstacle would pose a challenge today, let alone given the nature of communications equipment of the era.

There were longer-term logistical benefits associated with forces realigned and balanced between the east and west coasts. The promise of opening the eastern ports of Wonsan, Hungnam, and Iwon, which presumably suffered less damage than those of Inchon and Chinnamp'o through P'yongyang, must have been attractive to planners. Keeping two major forces operating independently on opposite coasts afforded a degree of redundancy and security in theater. Reducing reliance on the port at Inchon with its notorious tides also must have been an attractive option. Finally, eastern ports were closer to Japanese ports and afforded easier access for shipping than the western and some southern ports that UNC had been using up to this point.

Another factor supporting General MacArthur's maintenance of separate commands is the preparation for war termination. General MacArthur is reported to have planned on utilizing X Corps as occupation forces headquarters with General Almond as the Commander.<sup>16</sup> After Inchon, his concerns for post war security of Korea were prudent and go far in explaining an otherwise cumbersome command structure.

**Lesson 2.** Over-reliance on operational maneuver to achieve the strategic results envisioned by the UNC Commander, absent balancing input from the operational functional areas of intelligence and logistics, set the stage for strategic failure.

All things considered, in the fall of 1950 the UNC was in a perfect position to execute classic exploitation and pursuit operations to secure the fruits of victory. Exploitation and pursuit missions, by their very nature, focus heavily on mobility and freedom of maneuver. General MacArthur and General Almond held the widely shared belief that the supremacy of maneuver provided the key to victory. While other leaders in the Joint Staff, Eighth Army and X Corps were concerned with

the near reckless disposition of forces during the fall offensive, for General MacArthur and General Almond the desire to rapidly seize and occupy terrain was paramount.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding the strategic context and General MacArthur's predisposition for a war of maneuver, it is still difficult to understand how he could have so completely failed to incorporate consideration of intelligence and logistics, and to a lesser degree fires and command and control into his plan. According to General Ridgway,

While MacArthur's intense eagerness to complete his mission with dispatch is understandable, it is difficult to justify his plan and orders in the face of all that was known about the enemy's strength, his own supply situation, the terrain, and the manner in which his own command was dispersed -- even had they been adequately equipped and at full strength, which was far from the case.<sup>18</sup>

General MacArthur was convinced that the North Korean Army was crumbling. Further, he was operating under the assumption that the point had passed when the Chinese might intervene. During consultations with President Truman on Wake Island, he convinced the president of the inevitability of the enemy defeat. In so doing General MacArthur secured a free hand in what he believed would be the final phase of the war. In preparing for the final U. N. offensive, he created an independent zone of action for the X Corps.<sup>19</sup>

Repositioning X Corps resulted in an operational pause for the UNC, despite initially favorable unit dispositions that could have allowed the Corps to continue the attack on P'yongyang from its west coast location. This repositioning cost the UNC the initiative and had repercussions in the Eighth Army. The logistical challenges that brought about the operational pause were self-inflicted and are directly

attributable to the decision to pursue an east coast amphibious assault at Wonsan.<sup>20</sup>

The Eighth Army advance into North Korea had begun under great logistical difficulties and was supported only by the narrowest margin....The unfavorable supply situation largely grew out of the fact that during the first half of October (1 - 17 October) unloading activities at Inch'on for Eighth Army were negligible. Practically all the port capabilities at that time were engaged in mounting out the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division for the Wonsan operation. Levels of some supplies for I Corps were at times reduced to only one day, and only selective unloading enabled the supply sections to meet troop requirements. Most combat vehicles, such as tanks, operated in the forward zone without knowing whether they would have enough fuel at hand to continue the attack the next day. Because it could not support any more troops north of the Han River at this time, Eighth Army had been compelled to undertake the movement north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel with only one corps (I Corps), leaving IX Corps below the river.<sup>21</sup>

Most troubling of all is that the redeployments and unit dispositions after Inchon were frequently at odds with the very objectives they were designed to accomplish. It is absolutely clear that the withdrawal of X Corps from the P'yongyang front and its deployment to Wonsan cost the UNC momentum, initiative, time, and induced an operational pause within the Eighth Army at just the moment when pursuit and exploitation were most ripe for execution. The simple fact of the matter seems to be that matters the functions of intelligence, logistics, and command and control, as well as fires were either ignored or subordinated to such a degree to matters of maneuver that they were rendered ineffective.

The essence of military planning is management. During this operation, planners and leaders should have known that their operational tempo and logistical situation were leading to the classic "culminating point of victory." An operational pause was inevitable and inflicted itself on the force. Leaders of the UNC and its subordinate elements should have found a better way to manage the consequences of this



operational pause and timed the acceptance of the pause in such a manner as to compliment the ongoing prosecution of the war. This could have been accomplished by incorporating operational fires to help control the tempo of operations, or by improved coordination with diplomatic efforts.

The lesson for modern planners is simply to guard against the development of plans that wish away significant obstacles and to maintain balance in the execution of operations. It seems clear that operationally the UNC, General MacArthur, General Almond, and to a lesser degree General Walker, failed to adequately guard against the potential disruptions of an uncooperative enemy. Adequate controls were not in place to confirm or deny assumptions about enemy forces and friendly capabilities.

**Lesson 3.** Questions of the structure, organization, and chain of command are intimately connected with transforming operational success into strategic victory. This is a complex issue that does not lend itself to simple right or wrong solutions; often the options regarding command organization are equally advantageous. This case suggests that the best course of action is to focus on the first order task, in the case of the UNC in 1950 that task should have been the achievement of military victory over NKPA forces at the operational level before the rush to the Yalu.

Command and control lessons are ripe for the picking in this case study. General MacArthur employed an unorthodox command structure and adopted a series of controversial maneuvers that suggests he held some strongly preconceived notions regarding enemy options and the future course of the conduct of the war.<sup>22</sup> Most criticisms of the UNC command

structure during the 1950 offensive focus on two areas. First is the divided command structure between Eighth Army and X Corps, and the other was what we today would call a poor command climate.

The reliance on an ad hoc corps headquarters that later became the X Corps to serve as General Headquarters Reserve, created friction and undermined unity of command and unity of effort. By keeping X Corps separate from Eighth Army in Korea, General MacArthur created a command structure that functioned in a cumbersome manner and caused some concern within both Eighth Army and X Corps as well as among the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>23</sup> These officers held to the Von Schlieffen view, "It is better to abandon a whole province than to divide an army."<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the divided command structure was justified in MacArthur's view,

...terrain and logistical hardships warranted separate combat establishments. He claimed that the dual assault could be efficiently coordinated from Japan -- the actual base for all Korean operations, even though it was seven hundred miles distant -- without diminishing the combat power of either drive. MacArthur dismissed the risk of Chinese intervention, and was confident that the disintegrating North Korean Army posed no significant threat of counterattack to any prong of the advance.<sup>25</sup>

The poor command climate manifested itself throughout the American forces of the UNC. At the top there was distrust and lack of confidence between General MacArthur and General Walker. MacArthur's confidence in Walker was shaken in the summer by the losses in Eighth Army. Later he suspected that Walker was not working as hard to follow through on his instructions. Another element of poor command climate was the resentment within Eighth Army over the role of X Corps in Korea as an independent coequal command. One can hardly read about X Corps without noting the criticism of General Almond, and the open friction between Almond and Marine General O.P. Smith.<sup>26</sup>

Questions of command and control are not new to the prosecution of war. These questions are as complex as any that pertain to the nature of war. General MacArthur could defend his choices regarding the method he elected to command the UNC. As we have seen, equally effective criticisms were offered both at the time and in the light of subsequent events that questioned the validity of General MacArthur's decision process. It may simply be true that it is difficult for a theater CINC, engaged in the matters of national and theater strategy, to single-handedly translate these ends into the operational execution of missions as the field commander. If this is true, then our current war fighting Commanders in Chief, will have the opportunity to weigh the same issues when deciding to establish Joint Task Force Commands or command operations themselves in future conflicts.

**Lesson 4.** Operational intelligence cannot be a regurgitation of strategic and national intelligence; its development has to be extremely sensitive to incorporate intelligence developed at the tactical level in order to bridge the gap between the two.

In Korea, operational intelligence failures were significant. They ranged from routine administrative reports that widely underestimated the effect of weather on the prosecution of operations,<sup>27</sup> to a tragic failure to appreciate the implications of a major UN (read US) presence on the Chinese border with North Korea leading to Chinese intervention.

UNC forces were ill served as they prepared to prosecute operations into North Korea. The higher intelligence elements allowed an inexplicable optimism to color their assessments of the course of the war. It would seem that from the weather to enemy actions they had preconceived notions of how the operation would unfold and were not prepared to receive and act on indications that pointed to a different

pattern. It is ironic that the tactical unit leaders up to and including Eighth Army all had a better appreciation of the risks that they faced as the UNC offensive penetrated deeper and deeper into North Korea. The fact that their concerns were not incorporated into higher headquarters assessments is indicative of a clear break in the intelligence cycle and points at the very failure of operational intelligence that military leaders need to guard against.

The theater commander, General MacArthur, should have filled the role of further enlightening national leaders and the UN of the increasing risks associated with continued prosecution of the offensive in North Korea. Indeed this was one of his tasks and a role that the national and UN leadership vitally needed to have filled.<sup>28</sup>

Operational intelligence is not strategic intelligence or tactical intelligence; rather it is the mixture of the two.<sup>29</sup> This operation marks America's most dramatic intelligence failure, and points to the critical role of a dynamic intelligence cycle in managing risk and effective establishment of national strategic and operational military objectives.

**Lesson 5.** Development of effective operational fires is often a problem of targeting, restrictive rules of engagement, and the proper assessment of their effect.

However, during this operation there was a remarkable lack of operational fires, principally due to the nature of the enemy forces, political restrictions, and the absence of operational intelligence.<sup>30</sup> Both Chinese and North Korean forces were amorphous. They had divested themselves of most heavy equipment. They were principally light infantry forces living deep in the rugged terrain of North Korea or broken down in smaller groups which complicated targeting processes.

Further, after the fall of P'yongyang, there was no real critical infrastructure associated with the NKPA; the destruction of which would yield significant effect of a military nature. The question of PRC infrastructure was the subject of some discussion.

The much-noted conflict between MacArthur and the national leadership over bombing in China, particularly Manchuria, created the framework for limiting the means by which the UNC would wage the war. The national objective of limiting the scope of the war and preventing escalation and expansion provided for the restriction of targets; this created operational sanctuary for enemy forces and infrastructure in China. The military effects of this decision greatly shortened the already compressed communist lines of supply. The only concession afforded MacArthur in these questions, was the ability to bomb bridges over the Yalu. This was made moot within weeks because the river froze which made the destruction of the bridges largely irrelevant.

Notwithstanding the "non-event" that operational fires were during this operation there is a vital lesson for planners here. Political and higher strategic limits on the prosecution of military operations can and will have a significant effect on waging war at the operational level and limiting the effectiveness of operational fires. This challenge, clearly illustrated in this case and subsequently borne out in numerous other conflicts, will present itself in the future. Fires must be tailored by the effect desired and balanced between strategic risks versus operational benefits.

### **Conclusion**

Flawed strategic assessment, rigidly scripting enemy options, and refusing to accept actions contrary to these assumptions created conditions for strategic disaster. Opportunistic operational maneuver

executed without regard for sound tactical and operational principles, coupled with a faulty command structure all undermined the success of the UNC offensive in Korea in 1950. This failure haunts the Korean people and America to this day. Future vigilance in balancing operational functions provides the best chance of strategic success.

## Notes

1. Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A Canzona, USMC, based on research by K. Jack Bauer, PhD. "U. S. Marine Corps Operations in Korea 1950 - 1953: Volume III The Chosin Reservoir Campaign", Historical Branch, G-3 Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps, Government Printing Office Washington, D. C. 1957, page 1.
2. Martin Lichterman, To The Yalu And Back, Inter-University Case Program # 92, The Bobbs-Merrill Company (A Subsidiary of Howard W. Sams & Company, Inc.) Indianapolis/New York/Kansas City, 1967, page 20 and 21. It is worth noting that the United Nations endorsement of expanded war aims involving the unification of Korea and the holding of democratic elections was passed by a vote of 54 ayes, 5 noes, and 7 abstentions on 7 October 1950. It is further worth noting that General MacArthur had the full support of both the United States Government and the United Nations in crossing the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to conduct combat operations against the NKPA, well before U.S. forces actually crossed the parallel on 8 October (Korean time). By the end of September and first of October both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense Marshall had specifically authorized General MacArthur to cross the parallel. Further see, "U. S. Marine Corps Operations in Korea 1950 - 1953: Volume III The Chosin Reservoir Campaign", Historical Branch, G-3 Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps, Government Printing Office Washington, D. C. 1957, page 3 - 6. See also Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office pages pages 607 - 609.
3. Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 125. The cited reference addresses the P'yongyang as MacArthur's initial focus.
4. Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 125.
5. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office pages page 610 - 612, and 638. Mathew B. Ridgway, The Korean War, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967, pages 42 - 44. Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 125 - 127.
6. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office page 611 and 638. The effect of repositioning X Corps induced an operational pause on the actions of UNC, at least in so far as the Eighth Army offensive actions are concerned. The Eighth Army commander and his staff recognized the futility of reorienting X Corps to the East coast. Further, the movement of the X Corps also resulted in a serious loss of supplies flowing through Inchon. Additionally, on

the effect of the repositioning see, Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 129 - 130. Stanton makes the point that the tactical relief in place associated with the transition between X Corps and Eighth Army units along the front lines north of Seoul resulted in the loss of offensive tactical actions, cost time, and afforded the enemy time in the absence of offensive pressure.

7. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office page 611. The futility of the X Corps redeployment to the east coast of North Korea was predicted by Eighth Army, and to some degree the difficulties associated with this redistribution of forces were foreseen.

8. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office pages 633 - 637, 638 - 653.

9. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office page 654 and 655 with map on page 655, page 663, 665 - 666, with insert map number 21. For commentary on the logistical situation of the Eighth Army see page 668 - 669.

10. Orlando Ward, Korea - 1950, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952, page 153.

11. Orlando Ward, Korea - 1950, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952, page 153.

12. Orlando Ward, Korea - 1950, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952, page 232 - 233.

13. Martin Lichterman, To The Yalu And Back, Inter-University Case Program # 92, The Bobbs-Merrill Company (A Subsidiary of Howard W. Sams & Company, Inc.) Indianapolis/New York/Kansas City, 1967, page 10, 15 - 17, and 21. The three specific missions were the expulsion of NKPA forces and the restoration of international peace and security in the area (authorized by the third security council resolution during the initial phases of the crisis.) The next mission was the destruction of the NKPA forces in order to provide for the establishment of international peace and security in the area. This expansive step was broadly endorsed within the UN and in the diplomatic community publicly. The next mission was the UN authorized directive for holding elections and "the establishment of a unified, independent, and democratic government in the sovereign State of Korea."



14. The reasons compelling the expansion of war aims are less a result of MacArthur's push for expansion than they are the product of the times in which the decisions regarding expansion were made. Internationally the expansion of Communism had caused an awakening in the free world that the threat had to be met. The state department was active in advocating a philosophy of containment and later including the roll back of the communist tide. Domestic politics created pressure in the executive and legislative branches that the election year cycle exacerbated. Allies in the United Nations were as active as the United States diplomats in recognizing both the threat and the opportunities associated with the remarkable turn around in the military situation in Korea. Finally there was little distinction between the types of communism, Tito's independent brand, the Soviet and Chinese were all viewed in the same manner -- as an aggressive threat to free nations.

15. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office pages page 612. Eighth Army accepted movement of forces to the eastern coast as operationally prudent, the issue was simply one of forces and timing. This is indicated clearly by the fact that General Walker discussed at least two alternative proposals to shift forces to the eastern coast. General MacArthur's counter in insisting on an amphibious movement, which was opposed by Eighth Army, Admiral Joy (Commander of Naval Forces Far East), and General O. P. Smith, was that the logistical challenges associated with supporting forces shifted overland were simply too great. General Walker's plan proposed supporting forces shifted east through the P'yongyang-Wonsan corridor by trucking supplies from the ports of Pusan and Inchon. Given the difficulty later demonstrated in sustaining Eighth Army alone via the same methods I believe that it is reasonable to question whether General Walker's proposals were logistically any better than General MacArthur's option.

16. Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 150 - 152.

17. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office pages page 488. For information on General MacArthur's affinity to link mobility and maneuver to sea control as a method of achieving quick and decisive victory the following quote, describing General MacArthur's actions prior to Inchon is instructive and equally applicable to describe his intentions at Wonsan with X Corps.

It was natural and predictable that General MacArthur should think in terms of an amphibious landing in the rear of an enemy to win the Korean War. ... Control of the seas gives mobility to military power. Mobility and war of maneuver have always brought the greatest prizes and the quickest decisions to their practitioners.

Also see, LtCol Charles E. Kerr, "Flawed Decisions: The Korean War September - November 1950", US Army War College Strategic Research Project, 1996, pages 10-12.

As equally instructive in describing the strength of the maneuverist's tendencies in General Almond is the following,

General Almond was a mobility-oriented commander. From childhood, he based his understanding of military strategy on the fast and bold Confederate raiders of the Shenandoah Valley. Almond's actual military experience confirmed these beliefs. In World War I, as a machine gun battalion leader (commander), he had rapidly displaced machine guns forward to bring their fires close into close supporting range at all times. Although Smith (MajGen O.P. Smith Commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division) believed Almond hurried the Marines beyond prudent military preparations, the speed and shock of the X Corps advance carried the field at both Inchon and Seoul.

This quote taken from, Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 115. Further see pages 119 and 120,

The deterioration of enemy resistance in southern Korea offered tempting opportunities for classic wartime exploitation. The allied forces were in excellent position to pursue the battered North Korean Army to its destruction. In MacArthur's view such a crushing move, if executed promptly while the opportunity existed, promised complete victory...

Similarly the following describe the concern of other leaders within the Joint Staff, Eighth Army, and X Corps see Mathew B. Ridgway, The Korean War, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967, pages 60-61, 63, 64-66, and 68-69. Further see, Edwin P. Hoyt, On To The Yalu, Stein and Day, Inc., Briarcliff Manor, NY, 1984, page 263.

18. Mathew B. Ridgway, The Korean War, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967, page 66.

19. Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 147 - 149.

20. Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 129 - 131 and 133 - 138.

21. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office pages page 638.

22. Mathew B. Ridgway, The Korean War, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967, page 42 - 43, 60 - 65, and 74 - 77. In his book Ridgway suggests that MacArthur was denied the benefit of constructive criticism in the development courses of action and of his operational guidance. Ridgway suggests that the Joint Chiefs of Staff

and Secretary of Defense were reluctant to question his judgment because of his remarkably successful operations during the Inchon to Seoul push.

Further, the split command structure between Eighth Army and X Corps and the relationship of the respective commanders to General MacArthur created an environment where General MacArthur was not receiving the benefit of honest and candid input from his subordinate leadership. Walker was convinced he was going to be relieved from command during the November time frame because of his reluctance to proceed at the pace MacArthur expected. On the other hand, given his loyalty, his admiration for, and previously close working relationship for General MacArthur, General Almond was reluctant to suggest anything to General MacArthur that he felt General MacArthur did not wish to hear.

For more on the relationship between MacArthur and Almond the following is offered,

General MacArthur elevated Almond to the command of X Corps for one simple reason: loyalty. ... Almond exhibited the unswerving personal allegiance and tough resolve that could keep X Corps moving in conformity with MacArthur's dictates. The supreme commander wanted a loyal subordinate who would faithfully adhere to his guidance with unquestioning exactitude.

Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 43.

Also see Edwin P. Hoyt, On To The Yalu, Stein and Day, Inc., Briarcliff Manor, NY, 1984, pages 205 - 206.

23. Roy E. Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office pages pages 488 - 490, and 609 - 610. See also Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 125 - 127.

24. Roy E. Applemen, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June - November 1950) Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C. 1992, U.S. Government Printing Office pages page 607.

25. Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 126.

26. Mathew B. Ridgway, The Korean War, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967, pages 42, and 64 - 65. Also see Edwin P. Hoyt, On To The Yalu, Stein and Day, Inc., Briarcliff Manor, NY, 1984, pages 205 - 206. Further, Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 124. For example, "X Corps also suffered from increasingly serious command friction between its top leaders. The relationship between Generals Almond and Smith had gone completely sour."

27. Shelby L. Stanton, "America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea, 1950" (31 Pamaron Way, Novato CA, Presidio Press 1989), page 120 and 141.

Intelligence estimates underestimated the effects of weather on operations to the extent that the Corps Operation Order declared "the period October - March is the most favorable for ground operations from the stand point of weather". This estimate of the situation ignored the shock effect of "Siberian winds and freezing temperatures" that plunged the mercury "far below zero". The absence of sufficient types and quantities of extreme cold weather clothing and unit equipment ensured that significant non-battle injuries would be incurred from exposure.

Also see, Martin Lichterman, To The Yalu And Back, Inter-University Case Program # 92, The Bobbs-Merrill Company (A Subsidiary of Howard W. Sams & Company, Inc.) Indianapolis/New York/Kansas City, 1967. This is an excellent work with original insight and superior research in the areas of strategic decisions and an thorough assessment of intelligence failures of the period.

28. Martin Lichterman, To The Yalu And Back, Inter-University Case Program # 92, The Bobbs-Merrill Company (A Subsidiary of Howard W. Sams & Company, Inc.) Indianapolis/New York/Kansas City, 1967, page 20 and 23.

Nevertheless, as the directives issued to the Far East Command indicate, the theater commander was warned to keep in mind the potential threat of the Chinese. Then, starting in August, Mao Tze-tung and Chau En-lai began a series of public declarations on a central theme: they would not 'supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors savagely invaded by imperialists.' ... From late September on, the Chinese leaders, no doubt stirred by the Inchon landings, repeated and intensified their warnings. Beginning about 27 September on, even more threatening evidence of possible Chinese action was received by the U.S. ... What seems quite factual is that the Chinese threats were real threats, and that our political and military leaders and the leaders of all our allies did not take them seriously. The pleas of the two neutrals, India and Yugoslavia, were thrust aside.

29. The author shares agreement with the position of Dr. Milan N. Vego with respect to the role of Operational Intelligence. I am indebted to Professor Vego for spurring discussion during Joint Military Operations Seminar discussion at the Naval War College in which I participated and during which I was better enlightened to my position on this view. See Milan N. Vego, Operational Warfare, Naval Warfare College Publication NWC 1004, Copyright 2000, pages 203 - 216. For specific comments regarding the lack of operational intelligence during UNC operations in North Korea in 1950 see page 208.

30. The lack of operational fires may be contested by some, especially advocates of air power. However, despite significant and important contributions of air delivered fires these fires were in essence tactical fires. For a sense of the nature of air power contributions during this operation see, Mathew B. Ridgway, The Korean War, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967, pages 75 - 76.

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